

Lessons Worth Remembering: Combat in Urban Areas

A Monograph

by

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Seminar 7



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United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2016

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE					<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
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PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ORGANIZATION.						
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-05-2016		2. REPORT TYPE SAMS Monograph			3. DATES COVERED (From - To) June 2015 - May 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Lessons Worth Remembering: Combat in Urban Areas				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
				5b. GRANT NUMBER		
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJ Ron Hernandez				5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
				5e. TASK NUMBER		
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) 201 Reynolds Ave. Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301					8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) US Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301					10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
					11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited						
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES						
14. ABSTRACT Empirical data elucidates that the world's population is aggregating in cities at an alarming rate. In 1950, twenty-nine percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. Today, this statistic stands at fifty-four percent. By 2030, when the world's population is expected to be around 5 billion people, it is predicted that approximately sixty-one percent of the world's population will live in cities. This dramatic change in world demographics requires the US Army to take an introspective look in how it plans to thrive in the world's changing landscape. For centuries, armies have gravitated towards cities due to their operational and strategic importance in war. Cities possess political, religious, economical, and military power that largely cannot be ignored, or bypassed, by military commanders. History evinces a city's importance in war, and buttress the fact that urban warfare is nothing new. As the world's population continues to grow, the likelihood the US Army will operate in an urban environment will precipitously increase. Thus, the US Army must understand the complexity that foment within urban areas, realize that indigenous groups are best at resolving local problems, accept operating decentralized, and value the importance of supreme firepower.						
15. SUBJECT TERMS Urban Warfare, Maneuver, Aachen, Hue, Ramadi						
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a. REPORT Unclassified			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU		18. NUMBER OF PAGES 43	
b. ABSTRACT Unclassified					19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON MAJ Ron Hernandez	
c. THIS PAGE Unclassified					19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)	

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Abstract

Lessons Worth Remembering: Combat in Urban Areas, by MAJ Ron Hernandez, 43 pages.

Empirical data elucidates that the world's population is aggregating in cities at an alarming rate. In 1950, twenty-nine percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. Today, this statistic stands at fifty-four percent. By 2030, when the world's population is expected to be around 5 billion people, it is predicted that approximately sixty-one percent of the world's population will live in cities. This dramatic change in world demographics requires the US Army to take an introspective look in how it plans to thrive in the world's changing landscape. For centuries, armies have gravitated towards cities due to their operational and strategic importance in war. Cities possess political, religious, economical, and military power that largely cannot be ignored, or bypassed, by military commanders. History evinces a city's importance in war, and buttress' the fact that urban warfare is nothing new. As the world's population continues to grow, the likelihood the US Army will operate in an urban environment will precipitously increase. Thus, the US Army must understand the complexity that foment within urban areas, realize that indigenous groups are best at resolving local problems, accept operating decentralized, and value the importance of supreme firepower.

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Acknowledgments

My thanks to the soldiers, leaders, mentors, friends, and family that put me in a position to be able to participate in this school.

Acronyms

AQI	Al Qaeda of Iraq
ARVN	Army of Vietnam
CF	Coalition Forces
COP	Combat Outpost
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
SEAL	Sea Air Land Team
SURC	Small Unit Riverine Craft
VBIED	Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
VNMC	Vietnamese Marines

Introduction

Increased urbanization and global population growth pose significant challenges for military planners in the future.¹ In particular, the United Nations estimates that by 2050, sixty-six percent of the world's population will live in urban areas.² This population upsurge accounts for an estimated increase of 2.5 billion people living in urban areas in the next thirty-five years. While this growth will happen across the globe, up to ninety percent will take place in the developing countries of Asia and Africa, leading to an increased demand for essential services, such as "housing, infrastructure, transportation, energy and employment, as well as for basic services such as education and health care."³ These precipitous changes in world demographics, according to the National Intelligence Council's (NIC) *Global Trends 2030: Alternatives Worlds*, are expected to perpetuate significant changes, or megatrends, in the world's diplomatic, economic, and military power.⁴ These changes will lead to an uncertain security environment where US interests and national security are increasingly vulnerable to a variety of actors and a range of threats. With this rapid global urbanization and power shift away from traditional western security structures, the US Army needs to take an introspective look regarding its doctrine, organizational structure, training, leader development, and education to be prepared for tomorrow's complex problems.

¹ *World Urbanization Prospects 2014* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015), accessed 8 September 2015, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-2015-revision.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2012), ii.

According to the NIC, by 2030, the average world citizen will see a substantial increase in autonomy and prosperity.⁵ The growth of the global population, especially in urban areas, will lead to a majority of the world's population residing in cities where more economic and education opportunities exist.⁶ This urbanization will lead to a middle-class that is the "most important social and economic sector in the vast majority of countries around the world."⁷ With better access to education, affordable health care, and sources of information the average citizen will be the driving force behind global change.⁸ This change may take on the form of renewed economic growth in historically poor regions of the world, or super-empowered groups challenging the legitimacy of governments.

In addition to the empowerment of the new middle class, the power brokers in global politics will shift. By 2030, Asia will surpass all Western powers in population size, gross national product (GNP), military spending, and in technological investments.⁹ This will provide Asian nations, such as China and India, the potential to become world hegemonic powers.¹⁰ The friction caused by competition for regional power will be the source of diplomatic and military tensions across historically disputed borders and will spark military innovation. Despite economic growth, the demands placed on the state by the burgeoning middle-class and increased military spending will intensify Asia's requirement to provide basic services such as food, water, and housing.¹¹

⁵ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, iii.

⁶ N.L., "The City Triumphs, Again," *Babbage* (blog), *The Economist*, June 6, 2013, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/babbage/2013/06/urbanisation>.

⁷ NIC, *Global Trends 2030*, iii.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., iv.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., v.

By 2030, the growth of urban and coastal populations, coupled with the effects of climate change and disease in states already struggling to provide basic services, will create increased vulnerability for large-scale disasters. The demand for food, water, and energy is expected to increase by thirty-five to fifty percent in these areas.¹² This will strain the ability of many governments to provide for their citizens. Shortages caused by changing weather patterns or an outbreak of infectious diseases will be sources of strife within frail states.¹³ Other effects of climate change, including the increasing number and intensity of storms, will disrupt urbanized coastal populations. These storms can potentially lead to loss of vital infrastructure, destruction of urban habitats, and foment conflicts over basic resources. Infectious disease outbreaks, like the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, highlight the danger of a raging virus and the need for humanitarian intervention.¹⁴ While few will reach a global scale, the intentional release of pathogens in highly urbanized environments, the increasingly drug-resistant nature of bacteria, and the globalization of travel exacerbate global exposure to disease. The effects of these natural disasters on growing urban coastal populations may lead to the need for disaster response on an unprecedented scale.¹⁵

The *Army Operating Concept (AOC)* identifies the urban environment as one of the five future environments, which the Army must consider. Adversaries will seek ways to avoid the Army's strengths and will disrupt US advantages through the use of dense urban terrain.¹⁶ The *AOC* also discusses how it will require an understanding of the "technological, geographic,

¹² NIC, *Global Trends 2030*, vii.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy 2015* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶ H.R. McMaster, "Continuity and Change: The Army Operating Concept and Clear Thinking About Future War" *Military Review* (March-April 2015): 16.

political, and military challenges” to “thrive in complex and uncertain environments.”¹⁷ A large city’s complexity and uncertainty is a consequence of the interconnectedness and interactions between dynamic systems. This in turn makes each urban environment unique and appropriate for individualized staff analyzes.¹⁸ It is only through a thorough analysis of each complex urban environment that planners can then provide commanders viable military options.¹⁹

War is a phenomenon that tends to occur mainly where people live.²⁰ It has been endemic to roughly ninety-five percent of all known human societies throughout history.²¹ However, the Army’s current focus on training and equipping does not reflect this logic. Past revolutions in military affairs distinguish that a state’s army must always train for actual threats rather than hypothetical ones.²² Thus, the Army needs to review how urban operations are being integrated into unit training, Combat Training Centers, Centers of Excellence, and how it is equipping its soldiers. Sustaining the Army’s ability to operate and thrive in the urban environment must elevate in importance for Army leaders moving forward. All other environmental training must become second tier.

Global trends suggest that urban areas will increase in strategic and operational importance in the future.²³ This is key because where people reside not only create cities and

¹⁷ Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in A Complex World 2020-2040*, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/TP525-3-1.pdf>, 12.

¹⁸ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 5.

¹⁹ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-06: Urban Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 6-2.

²⁰ David Kilcullen, *Out of The Mountains: The Coming Age of The Urban Guerrilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²² MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300-2050* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 192.

²³ “Going to Town,” *Graphic Detail* (blog), *The Economist*, January 18, 2012, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2012/01/daily-chart-6>.

nations but also create centers of gravity as well.²⁴ Thus, this paper hypothesizes that the urban environment will be the US Army's primary operating environment in the future. Concomitant with this though, is not only the demand for the US Army to be able to fight block by block in a city, but also to have a firm understanding of how to keep a city alive.²⁵ Urban areas are living organisms that flow and breathe; any plan that does not allow it to continue to do so will likely be an unacceptable military solution in the future.²⁶ Thus, a whole systems approach is required in understanding urban areas because any single act influences more than just one thing.²⁷

Methodology

Having elucidated what tomorrow's world might look like, it is hypothesized that the urban environment will be the US Army's predominate operating environment in the future. From this, it is deduced that by understanding modern urban operations an understanding of future warfare can be established. To foster this understanding, three case studies will be examined. The first will be the Battle of Aachen in October 1944. This battle was one of the key battles on the Western Front during World War II, and it was the first German city captured by Allied Forces. This battle set the foundation for the US Army's initial understanding regarding urban warfare. The second case study examines the Battle for Hue in 1968. This battle was one of many that occurred during the Tet Offensive in Vietnam during the initial weeks of 1968. The Vietnam War is mostly known for its fighting in the jungles of Southeast Asia. However, Hue illustrates that war is a population-centric phenomenon. In order to win, urban areas must be incorporated into a military's operational approach. The last case study reviews the pacification of Ramadi, Iraq in 2006. The relatively unorthodox approach initiated by the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 1st

²⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1996), 530.

²⁵ Kilcullen, *Out of The Mountains*, 19.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: University Press, 1998), 291.

Armored Division served as a catalyst in recalibrating coalition forces understanding of urban warfare and counterinsurgency operations. Ramadi permeated new tactics, techniques, and procedures throughout Iraq and helped turn the tide on what appeared to be a war the US Army was losing.

Aachen: The Foundation of Modern Urban Operations

The first two years of World War II indicated that large battles of maneuver were the new major characteristic of modern war.²⁸ However, WWII marked the end of a relatively short period in military history where open-field battles dominated the employment of military force. Battles that took place in and around cities proved to be operationally decisive.²⁹ WWII commanders, seeking to fight in the open whenever possible, bypassed major urban areas at every opportunity.³⁰ Eventually, however, either a city could not be bypassed, or the presence of the bypassed enemy could not be tolerated. This is largely due to urban centers strategic and operational importance.³¹ This was evinced during the battle of Aachen in October 1944.

The American plan to seize the city of Aachen was tactically simple. The attack was led by VII Corps, which was comprised of the 3rd Armored Division, the 1st Infantry Division, and the 30th Infantry Division.³² The VII Corps' plan called for the envelopment of the city by having the 3rd Armored Division bypass Aachen to the south and advance east, and then northeast beyond the city into the town of Stolber. The 1st Infantry Division would position itself east and

²⁸ Roger J. Spiller, *Combined Arms in Battle Since 1939* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1992), 5.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Louis A. DiMarco, *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare from Stalingrad to Iraq* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012), 19.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Christopher R. Gabel, "Knock 'em All Down: The Reduction of Aachen, October 1944," *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2003), 65.

south of the city while the 30th Infantry Division would complete the envelopment by positioning itself to the north.³³

The battle to seize Aachen was planned in three phases. In phase one, the 30th Division would attack north of the city to drive east and then southeast to secure the town of Wurselen, about nine miles northeast of the city. The 2nd Armored Division would support the attack of the 30th and protect the 30th's northern flank from a German counterattack. The second phase called for the 1st Infantry Division to attack from the south to the north to secure Aachen's eastern suburbs and to link up with the 30th Division in Wurselen. Phase two's objective was the complete isolation of the city. The final phase of the attack planned for two battalions of the 1st Division's 26th Infantry to seize the city center itself.³⁴

On October 2, the attack on Aachen began with the US XIX Corps' aerial bombardment of German positions. This was followed by an artillery attack that included twenty-six artillery battalions firing approximately 20,000 rounds of ammunition.³⁵ The 30th Division attacked with two regiments, the 117th and 119th, on line.³⁶ From October 2-7, these two infantry regiments, augmented with reinforcements, made very little progress.³⁷ The Germans opposed every step of the 30th Division's advance, and each successful American attack was met with an aggressive German counterattack.

General Kochling, the commander of the German LXXXI Corps, supported by Field Marshals Model and von Rundstedt, used every available unit in the corps' sector to attempt to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* (Washington DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1963), 66-68.

³⁵ Gabel, "Knock 'em All Down," 68.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 69.

stop the American advance.³⁸ All three of the understrength assault-gun brigades in the corps were used to counterattack the Americans, including all of the King Tiger tanks that were available.³⁹ Infantry battalions were withdrawn from both north and south to help contain the US attack. An entire infantry regiment and six powerful antitank guns were pulled from within Aachen to reinforce the units fighting the 30th Division attack. In addition, the Germans massed large amounts of artillery to disrupt the American forward positions and their crossing sites at the Wurm River. The US forces successfully met each German counterattack and kept the 30th Division's attack moving. By October 7, the 30th Division had secured the town of Alsdorf, and its southernmost regiment was positioned three miles from the division's final objective, the town of Wurselen. By seizing Alsdorf, the 30th Division captured one of two highways leading into Aachen, leaving the German LXXXI Corps only one line for supply and communications.⁴⁰

The German LXXXI Corps expended all of its resources in its unsuccessful effort to stop the 30th Division's attack. Its reserves were fully committed, which included all of its mobile assault-gun brigades, the 108th Panzer Brigade, and the 506th Heavy Tank Battalion. These units were only partially filled, and as an aggregate only added up to roughly the size of a weak American armored combat command.⁴¹ To help buttress the German defenses at Aachen, von Rundstedt released his theater reserves, the rebuilt 116th Panzer Division and the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division.⁴² These divisions were not fully-manned, nor were they sufficiently equipped. However, they were complemented with their own infantry, artillery, and antitank

³⁸ Harry Yeide, *The Longest Battle: From Aachen to the Roer and Across* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2005), 47.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Christopher Gabel, "Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain: The 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, at Aachen, October 1944," *Combined Arms in Battle Since 1939* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1992), 166-167.

⁴¹ Charles Whiting, *Bloody Aachen* (New York: Military Heritage Press, 1988), 28-29.

⁴² Yeide, *The Longest Battle*, 33.

guns.⁴³ This was a significant counterattack force, but it would take several days for them to enter the battle.

On October 8, the 1st Division attacked to complete the encirclement of Aachen. Its lead regiment, the 18th Regiment, attacked first to link the division with the 3rd Armored Division located to the southeast in Stolberg. Within forty-eight hours, the regiment succeeded in taking all of its objectives with very few casualties. By October 10, the 1st Division was firmly in their new positions, waiting to linkup with the 30th Division who were coming from the north.⁴⁴

As 1st Division waited to conduct their link-up, the 116th Panzer Division and 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, arrived to counterattack the Americans. However, the 1st Division was prepared, and as the German infantry advanced across open ground, six American artillery battalions fired a preplanned barrage on the exposed infantry. Furthermore, a squadron of P-47 fighter-bombers helped neutralize the German heavy armor threat. American firepower continued to pour on to the German attackers as well as their supporting units. This prevented the Germans from bringing forward reinforcements, supplies, and ammunition.⁴⁵ By October 16, the 3rd Panzer Grenadier division had lost a third of its strength in conducting the German counterattack.⁴⁶ Thus, ending the most dangerous threat to VII Corps.

As the 1st Infantry Division attacked and defended against the German counterattack to the south, the 30th Division began its attack in the north by moving south to seize the town of Wurselen. Control of this town would close the last route into Aachen and put the 30th Division

⁴³ Yeide, *The Longest Battle*, 33.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 88-89.

⁴⁶ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 281.

approximately one mile from the 1st Division's westernmost unit.⁴⁷ Elements from the 30th Division would patrol this area to seal and close off German access to Aachen.⁴⁸

The attack to linkup began on October 8 when the 1st Division's main attack forces collided with a German counterattack. The Germans were beaten back with severe losses, but they were successful in stopping 1st Division's main attack. During the night, the German infantry reverted to the defense. The 506th Tiger tanks moved south to join the attack against the 1st Infantry Division on the opposite side of Aachen, and a Panzer Brigade moved south to continue the attack to expand the avenue of approach into Aachen. On October 9, the 108th Panzer Brigade attacked again but ran into elements of the 30th Division also attacking. The Germans successfully defeated these units and seized the town of Bardenberg from the Americans.⁴⁹

Losing the town of Bardenberg caused great concern for the 30th Division because it effectively isolated two of its battalions. These battalions secured Wurselen, the northern portion of the division's objective.⁵⁰ An attempt to retake the town was made but it was unsuccessful. However, during the division's attack, its 120th Regiment was able to capture the road leading into the town, effectively isolating the German forces.⁵¹ At night, US forces withdrew from the edges of Bardenberg to allow American artillery to bombard the town. The next day a well-rested American infantry battalion attacked the town and captured it after fighting all day.⁵² The heavily contested fighting in Bardenberg required the 30th Division's commander, General Leland Hobbs, to commit all of his reserves. This placed the division at risk later in the day when General Hobbs

⁴⁷ MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 281.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 284-285.

⁵⁰ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*, 55.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

received intelligence reports identifying elements of a Panzer Division in the area.⁵³ To mitigate this risk, General Hobbs ordered part of his exhausted division to halt and defend. The rest of his division, however, had to refocus on the division's primary objective, the town of Wurselen.⁵⁴

On the morning of October 12, the 30th Division's attack on Wurselen was stalled by another German counterattack.⁵⁵ This attack was led by the I SS Panzer Corps, which assumed responsibility of the northern German defense from the LXXXI Corps.⁵⁶ The US XIX Corps commander, General Charles Corlett, believed that the 30th Division was facing two panzer divisions.⁵⁷ Throughout October 12, the 30th Division successfully halted the every German attack through the use of indirect fire.⁵⁸

The 30th Division resumed the attack to seize Wurselen on October 13. However, they made very little progress during the first few days.⁵⁹ The town was defended by a regiment of the 116th Panzer Division and was supported by a reconnaissance battalion, engineer battalion, and by small detachments of panzers.⁶⁰ The Americans attacked on a narrow front, which allowed the defending Germans to mass their fires on their approaching enemy. After barely advancing 1,000 yards in three days, the 30th Division opened a new attack along the Wurm River on October

⁵³ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*, 56.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Gabel, "Knock 'em All Down," 77.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 78.

16.⁶¹ The attack made rapid progress and enabled the 30th Division to link up with the 1st Infantry Division by 1615 hours, thus, isolating the German garrison in Aachen.⁶²

During the two-week battle outside the city of Aachen, things remained relatively quiet for the most part inside the city. Over 5,000 defenders, under the command of Colonel Gerhardt Wilck, waited in the center of Aachen for the American assault.⁶³ Wilck's forces consisted of a few tanks, artillery support from outside the city, and a large amount of regular infantry.⁶⁴ Colonel Wilck's men had ample time to conduct engagement area development and were not surprised when the Americans decided to attack.

On October 11, the American's commenced firing on the city of Aachen with 100 guns for the entire day. Over 500 tons of ammunition was fired into the city to set the conditions for the American assault.⁶⁵ On October 12, the attack on the city center began with the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry attacking on the right, and the following day the 2nd Battalion attacking on the left. The objective of 3/26 Infantry was to cover the right flank of 2/26 and to clear the industrial areas on the north side of the city.⁶⁶ The 2/26 had the mission of attacking into the city center, which was filled with debris from destroyed and partly destroyed buildings.⁶⁷ Thus, 2/26 had to move debris and clear each building it passed resulting in a very slow and systematic pace.

Prior to launching their attack, the Americans carefully analyzed the risks associated with seizing Aachen and identified four areas of friction: (1) command and control, (2) high ammunition consumption, (3) the vulnerability and demand for armor support, and (4) civilians

⁶¹ Peter McCarthy and Mike Syron, *Panzerkrieg* (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2002), 250.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 251.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 252.

⁶⁵ Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 149.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

on the battlefield.⁶⁸ Developing graphic control measures such as common street names enabled units to provide quick pinpoint information regarding their location and where to mass artillery fire, thus, abating the command and control problem.⁶⁹ Positioning ammunition caches close to the companies solved the ammunition problem.⁷⁰ Commanders mitigated their armor vulnerabilities by minimizing their tanks exposure and by keeping infantry close to them.⁷¹ Lastly, civilians on the battlefield were mitigated by evacuating them as units advanced through the city.⁷²

To help position the company commanders on the frontlines in a position of advantage, the composition of the companies were adjusted for the fight in the city. For instance, in 2/26 the battalion commander reorganized his battalion to create three autonomous assault companies.⁷³ The battalion's enablers and heavy weapons systems were distributed evenly among the companies to improve their firepower and maneuverability.⁷⁴ Even the battalion's reserve element was pushed down to the companies; any reserve would have to be provided by higher headquarters.⁷⁵

By October 15, 2/26 and 3/26 fought their way deep into the heart of Aachen.⁷⁶ Both battalion's avoided the streets and instead moved from building to adjacent building by knocking down walls.⁷⁷ Tanks moved steadily down the streets but only with infantry support and stopped

⁶⁸ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*, 88.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Gabel, "Knock 'em All Down," 81.

⁷¹ Gabel, "Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain," 170.

⁷² MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 308.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

only in areas that provided adequate protection for the vehicles. However, many German bunkers and buildings were resistant to tank fire.⁷⁸ To overcome these obstacles, 155mm self-propelled artillery guns were brought forward to support both battalions.⁷⁹ These fire systems proved of being capable of bringing down a multistory apartment building with a single round, thus, increasing 2/26 and 3/26's maneuverability.⁸⁰

By October 19, Colonel Wilck began to understand that his defenses were crumbling and the inevitable was going to happen. On October 20, the Americans seized over half of the city and their pace began to increase significantly.⁸¹ With very few options left, Colonel Wilck surrendered to the Americans on October 21, against Hitler's orders.⁸²

Deductions from Aachen

After nineteen days of intense fighting, the US Army captured Aachen and its 20,000 remaining inhabitants. This battle highlights three key areas regarding urban operations. The first being the critical role that armor plays in urban environments.⁸³ Tanks were a key element in all operations to help facilitate the seizure of Aachen, inside and outside the city. Second, Aachen highlights the necessity and importance for units to be able to adapt to conditions on the ground. US Forces quickly recognized the need for combined-armed assault teams at the lowest levels and tailored their organizations to be able to achieve success on the battlefield.⁸⁴ Lastly, the level of importance fighting outside the city plays in setting the conditions for seizing a city.⁸⁵ When

⁷⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ambrose, *The Victors*, 258.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*, 62.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 65.

LXXXI Corps was defeated outside Aachen and US forces isolated the city, victory was then virtually guaranteed victory.

Battle for Hue: No Matter the Grammar, Where People Reside Matters

Almost twenty-four years after Aachen, US forces became involved in the Vietnam War. Vietnam is a war that is mostly remembered for being fought in the fields and jungles of Southeast Asia. Vietnam is not a war associated with urban fighting, but in the winter of 1968 the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive. The purpose of this offensive was to bring the war into the urban centers of South Vietnam.⁸⁶ One of the most decisive, hard fought, and dramatic of the 1968 battles was the battle for the city of Hue.

The North Vietnamese plan to seize Hue was basic. Viet Cong guerrillas would infiltrate the city days before the attack, and then would observe their objectives until told to attack. The three main objectives identified to be seized were: (1) the headquarters of the 1st Army of Vietnam (ARVN) Infantry Division, (2) the Tay Loc airfield, and (3) the 1st ARVN Division's Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) advisors' compound.⁸⁷ All three of these objectives were relatively close to each other; however, the MACV compound was isolated from the other objectives due to the Perfume River.⁸⁸

The plan called for the Viet Cong to initiate the operation by attacking civilian targets while two battalions of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) sappers attacked military and government positions in the city. Two regiments of PAVN infantry would then flow into the city

⁸⁶ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 536.

⁸⁷ James Arnold, *Tet Offensive 1969: Turning Point in Vietnam* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1994), 41.

⁸⁸ Arnold, *Tet Offensive 1969*, 41.

to prepare defensive positions for the eventual counterattack. A third PAVN infantry regiment had the task of ensuring that the PAVN line of communications into Hue remained secure.⁸⁹

The Viet Cong and PAVN launched their attack in the early hours of January 31, 1968.⁹⁰ It was timed to coincide with hundreds of other attacks all over South Vietnam to achieve complete surprise. The initial attacking force, numbering as many as 10,000 PAVN and Viet Cong troops, captured most of the city with very little resistance.⁹¹ The PAVN 6th Regiment entered and secured the northern part of the city with the aid of the Viet Cong, who were wearing South Vietnamese army uniforms. The PAVN 4th Regiment quickly secured the south side of the river. The PAVN troops had received special training in urban fighting and immediately began to dig in and prepare defenses. Outside of the city, the PAVN 5th Regiment set up defensive positions to protect the attackers' line of communications and supply into the city. At the same time, political officers moved throughout the city arresting several thousand pre-identified individuals.⁹²

The PAVN 6th Regiment attacked the objectives north of the Perfume River, known as the Citadel area, and moved rapidly from the southwest to the northeast. PAVN forces encountered very little resistance until reaching Tay Loc airfield. An all-volunteer unit from the 1st ARVN Division's reconnaissance company defended the airfield. Although outnumbered, this unit held off multiple PAVN attacks to maintain the airfield.⁹³ After multiple failed attempts, the PAVN 6th Regiment moved around the airfield to attack the 1st ARVN headquarters.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁰ Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 239.

⁹¹ James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 45.

⁹² Ibid., 47.

⁹³ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 52.

However, like at the airfield, the 6th PAVN met strong resistance from the 1st ARVN troops defending from within their walled compound. The PAVN initiated a rocket bombardment to help them in their attack; however, this bombardment only alerted the personnel of the MACV compound located to the south of the city. Thus, though the PAVN attack was very successful in capturing ninety-five percent of the city, it failed to capture the three most important military objectives in the city.⁹⁴

By sunrise on the morning of January 31, the PAVN firmly controlled South Vietnam's second largest city.⁹⁵ Fighting continued at the airfield, 1st ARVN headquarters, and MACV compound as PAVN indirect fire continued at a regular rate.⁹⁶ As chaos reigned on the first day of the Tet Offensive, units throughout South Vietnam radioed for reinforcements, inundating all headquarters with requests for help. Slowly, though, ARVN and MACV formed a plan to save the city of Hue. The plan fomented into three phases: phase one, a battle on the north side of the river, phase two a battle occurring on the south side of the river, and phase three a battle taking place outside the city between the PAVN 5th Regiment and elements of the US 1st Cavalry Division.⁹⁷

Unaware of the scale of the attack in Hue, Task Force X-Ray in Phu Bai, approximately thirty kilometers north of Hue, dispatched Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment.⁹⁸ Their guidance was simply to go and relieve the MACV compound in southern Hue.⁹⁹ With no real intelligence as to the situation, Alpha loaded into trucks and moved up the highway toward

⁹⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁵ Eric Hammel, *Fire in the Streets: The Battle for Hue, Tet 1968* (Pacifica, CA: Contemporary Books, 1991), 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 49.

⁹⁸ Nicholas Warr, *Phase Line Green: The Battle for Hue, 1968* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 31.

⁹⁹ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 48.

Hue.¹⁰⁰ During the march, the infantry company was joined by a platoon of tanks from the 3rd Marine Tank Battalion.¹⁰¹ Together the small task force moved toward Hue, encountering sniper fire and occasionally being forced to stop to clear enemy-occupied buildings along their route. As the company crossed the Phu Cam Canal and entered the southern part of Hue, it received light and heavy machine-gun fire from the enemy.¹⁰² After two hours of intense fighting, the Marines were forced to pull back due to one-third of the unit being killed or wounded.¹⁰³ The company had no other option than to radio for help.

Task Force X-Ray responded to the call for help from Alpha by dispatching Gulf Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment.¹⁰⁴ The company commander, Captain Charles Meadows, had no knowledge regarding the situation in Hue. Never the less, he loaded up his Marines in trucks and started moving towards the city.¹⁰⁵ Gulf Company linked up with Alpha and together the two infantry companies, supported by tanks and antiaircraft guns, pushed on to the MACV compound, which they successfully relieved later in the afternoon. Upon reporting to X-Ray the success of the mission, Alpha and Gulf were ordered to continue to attack north across the Perfume River Bridge. Both companies were to link up with the ARVN forces fighting on the north side of the river.¹⁰⁶

Gulf Company took the lead and was proceeding to their objective across the Nguyen Hoang Bridge when the opposite bank erupted with fire.¹⁰⁷ In the initial volley, approximately ten

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Shulimson, Leonard Blasiol, Charles Smith, and David Dawson, *US Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington DC: US Marine Corp, 1997), 398.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰⁶ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*, 79.

Marines were either killed or wounded on the bridge.¹⁰⁸ Allied tanks immediately returned fire to suppress the PAVN machine guns to allow the Marines the ability to maneuver. With the aid of the suppressive fires, Gulf Company pushed forward across the bridge while simultaneously gathering its dead and wounded.¹⁰⁹

On the far side of the bridge the Marines encountered the closely packed housing that surrounded the Citadel walls. The PAVN fire increased from all directions as the Marines began to enter the city.¹¹⁰ It became obvious to Gulf Company's higher headquarters that there were insufficient forces for the task they had been assigned. Furthermore, there was a genuine fear that the enemy might envelop the company. Upon realizing this likely conclusion, Caption Meadows was ordered to withdraw his company back to the south bank, a difficult task under enemy fire.¹¹¹ By 2000 hours, the Marines were again consolidated on the south bank of the river.¹¹² Gulf Company had managed to bring all of their dead and wounded back to the south bank in their withdrawal, but the attempt to cross the bridge was costly. Fifty Marines had been killed or wounded on and around the bridge, a third of the company.¹¹³ As night fell at the end of the first day of fighting in Hue, the Marines were engaged, but they were outnumbered and the situation appeared dire on the south side of the river.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹¹¹ James Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue, 1968," *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2003), 135.

¹¹² Ibid., 135.

¹¹³ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 49.

¹¹⁴ Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue," 135.

The next day, February 1, Alpha and Gulf's new mission was to attack west to secure the Thua Thien Provincial Headquarters and the prison, six blocks from the MACV compound.¹¹⁵ Although Captain Meadows company received significant casualties the previous day, Gulf Company again took the lead in what appeared to be a simple six-block movement to rescue South Vietnamese forces still holding out in the provincial headquarters. However, the attack stalled immediately. This simple movement took all the company's resources to advance, one building at a time. Gulf Company found themselves in a room-by-room, building-by-building struggle against the enemy.¹¹⁶ That evening a third Marine company, Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, entered the battle and took over the advance from Gulf.¹¹⁷ In its first few hours of combat, Fox suffered seven casualties in its lead platoon.¹¹⁸ At the end of the day, all three companies advanced less than one block.¹¹⁹

On the third day of the battle, February 2, Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment arrived by convoy and was tasked with assisting Alpha Company in securing Hue University.¹²⁰ Upon the completion of the mission, all four companies, Alpha, Fox, Gulf, and Hotel, found it necessary to attempt to expand their security zone to relieve the pressure around their parameter.¹²¹ The attempt failed and was immediately reciprocated with an unsuccessful counterattack by the PAVN 4th Regiment that lasted throughout the night.¹²²

On February 3, the 1st Marine Regiment Headquarters, under Colonel Stan Hughes, arrived in Hue to take over the battle, bringing with him another battalion commanded by

¹¹⁵ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 50.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue," 136.

¹¹⁸ Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*, 217.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹²² Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue," 138.

Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham.¹²³ Cheatham's battalion, 2/5 Marines, took over the attack from 1/1 and began to clear the city south of the river.¹²⁴ Cheatham attacked west with two companies abreast, Hotel on the right moving parallel to the river, and Fox on the left sharing a boundary with Alpha. The attack, however, made no progress. The attacks failed due to a huge volume of fire aimed at the two lead companies.¹²⁵ The entire attack was further hindered by the requirement to keep the attacking companies on line. As one company was successful in its attack, the other was not, thus, stopping all forward progress.¹²⁶

On the fifth day of the battle, February 4, Fox and Hotel began to make progress. Both companies resumed their assault at 0700 hours.¹²⁷ Their objective remained the seizure of both the provincial headquarters and the prison, but the major obstacle in front of them was the heavily defended government treasury building.¹²⁸ To help neutralize the enemy's defenses, four E-8 gas launchers, loaded with sixty-four projectiles of CS tear gas, were positioned in front of the treasury building.¹²⁹ Upon dousing the building with a barrage of CS, tank and 106mm recoilless rifle fire began destroying the building.¹³⁰ Most of the enemy withdrew as the CS gas began to permeate throughout the building.¹³¹ Thus, making it easy for a single platoon of Marines,

¹²³ Norman Cooling, "Hue City, 1968: Winning a Battle While Losing a War," *Marine Corp Gazette*, July 2001, accessed December 15, 2015, <https://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/Hue-city-1968-winning-battle-while-losing-war>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*, 165.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹³⁰ Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue," 141.

¹³¹ Ibid.

wearing gas masks, to smash through the front door and systematically cleared the large three-story building.¹³²

As Hotel and Fox executed their assault, Alpha Company initiated their attack against a heavily defended Catholic Church and school, the Saint Joan D'Arc, located just south.¹³³ Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment arrived just in time by convoy to assist Alpha in their attack. This gave Colonel Gravel's 1/1 Marines two reasonably fit companies, Alpha and Bravo.¹³⁴ In the course of the afternoon, both companies consolidated their position around the school and church complex, and reluctantly began to destroy the buildings with mortars and 106mm recoilless rifle fire.¹³⁵ This successfully killed and drove the enemy away.

On February 5, Gulf Company moved on line with Hotel and Fox, establishing a three-company front to increase 2/5's combat power moving forward.¹³⁶ The battalion began its movement westward early on the 5th, and quickly captured a city block with little resistance.¹³⁷ This brought the battalion in front of the Hue City Hospital complex, which was fortified by the enemy and was serving as the hospital for the 4th PAVN Regiment.¹³⁸ All three companies used the techniques they had learned in Hue to systematically seize one complex building after another, thus, enabling them to be positioned one block away from the Provincial Headquarters building by the end of the day.¹³⁹

The morning of February 6 began with 2/5 Marines preparing to assault their final objective. The Provincial Capital had three sub-objectives: (1) the provincial capital in the

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 140.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹³⁶ Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*, 198.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 205.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 218.

northern portion, (2) the provincial prison in the middle, and (3) hospital buildings at the southern end of the block.¹⁴⁰ Fox attacked their objective first, the hospital building. This area was not heavily defended, but the company took several casualties from PAVN soldiers firing from the high prison walls.¹⁴¹ After a relatively short engagement, Fox successfully seized all the hospital buildings.

With Fox set, Gulf Company, located in the center, bombarded the prison with mortars for over two hours, then breached the walls of the prison and quickly overran the defenders.¹⁴² This was followed by the final assault of the day, Hotel's attack on the provincial headquarters. Hotel initiated their attack with over one-hundred rounds of mortar fire followed by a bombardment of CS gas.¹⁴³ This enabled Hotel's lead platoon to assault directly through the front door of the provincial headquarters. Once inside, the Marines quickly cleared the building.¹⁴⁴

By February 10, the southern part of the city was considered secured.¹⁴⁵ Thousands of Vietnamese civilians came out of the hiding, and a civil affairs collection and assistance point was set up by the US and South Vietnamese military to handle them.¹⁴⁶ However, the battle for Hue was far from over. Attention now shifted to the ARVN 1st Division and PAVN 6th Regiment north of the river.

Beginning on February 2, the ARVN 1st Division recalled units back to Hue to organize a counterattack to recapture the city.¹⁴⁷ By the following day, the ARVN was able to initiate an attack against the PAVN 6th Regiment. However, the division's commander, General Truong,

¹⁴⁰ Cooling, "Hue City, 1968."

¹⁴¹ Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue," 143.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Arnold, *Tet Offensive 1969*, 82.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*, 113.

realized that without more forces he would not be able to recapture the city. General Truong made this clear to his immediate headquarters and was given the ARVN's strategic reserve, the ARVN Airborne Task Force.¹⁴⁸

By February 12, after about two weeks of fighting, General Truong and the ARVN recaptured about forty-five percent of the Citadel.¹⁴⁹ However, the ARVN 1st Division was exhausted and depleted by casualties.¹⁵⁰ The ARVN Airborne Task Force had likewise expended a significant amount of its strength.¹⁵¹ Both the South Vietnamese and the US commands agreed to provide reinforcements, particularly since the decisive fighting on the south side of the river was over.

The American command chose the 1st Battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment (1/5 Marines) to reinforce the ARVN in the old Citadel portion of Hue.¹⁵² On the ARVN side, three battalions of Vietnamese Marines (VNMC) were identified to reinforce Hue.¹⁵³ The plan called for the US Marines to attack along the northeastern wall of the Citadel, relieving the Vietnamese Airborne Task Force, while the VNMC attacked along the southwestern wall.¹⁵⁴ The wall itself was an ancient fortification that was up to twenty feet thick and flat on top. In some places along the wall, buildings were built on top of the wall.¹⁵⁵ The objective of both attacking forces was the walled Imperial Palace compound located in the center of the southeastern wall just north of the river.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith, and Dawson, *US Marines in Vietnam*, 439.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 440.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Arnold, *Tet Offensive 1969*, 82.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Arnold, *Tet Offensive 1969*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 84.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

After traveling 1,000 kilometers from Ben Hua in two days, the 1/5 Marines were ready to relieve the ARVN Airborne Task Force on February 12.¹⁵⁷ To their surprise though, enemy forces fired from the top of the Citadel wall as they approached the Task Force's position.¹⁵⁸ The Marines took casualties and immediately deployed into tactical formations. The battalion's lead element, Alpha Company, successfully attacked the wall, but at a price.¹⁵⁹ It was later determined that the ARVN had pulled out of the city during the night without coordinating, and the PAVN 6th regiment had reoccupied their positions.¹⁶⁰

The casualties of the first day of the attack hit Alpha Company the hardest, and as the attack began again on February 14, the battalion attacked with Bravo Company on the left, wrestling with the dominating Citadel northeastern wall, and C Company on the right fighting along the outside wall of the Imperial Palace, Alpha Company became the battalion's reserve.¹⁶¹ From February 14 to February 17, Bravo and Charlie fought forward, achieving one hard-fought block a day.¹⁶² After four days of continuous fighting, the battalion was two-thirds of the way to the southwestern wall of the Citadel.¹⁶³ The advance, however, was costly forcing the battalion to take a tactical pause to rest, replenish supplies, and bring forward replacements.¹⁶⁴

On February 20, 1/5 Marines resumed their attack, but this time very slowly and methodically.¹⁶⁵ Heavily relying on tanks, recoilless rifles, CS gas, artillery, and close air support,

¹⁵⁷ Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith, and Dawson, *US Marines in Vietnam*, 453.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 454.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Eric Hammel, *Marines in Hue City: A Portrait of Urban Combat Tet 1968* (Pacifica, CA: Pacifica Military History, 2014), 320.

¹⁶² Hammel, *Marines in Hue City*, 320.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 323.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ D. Hank Ellison, *Chemical Warfare During the Vietnam War: Riot Control Agents in Combat* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 106.

the Marines advanced only one block a day.¹⁶⁶ By February 23, the battalion reached the palace gates, and conducted a forward passage of lines with ARVN forces to allow them to seize the palace grounds.¹⁶⁷

The defeat of PAVN forces inside the city was largely influenced by the actions of US and ARVN forces outside the city. Initially, both the Vietnamese and US high commands were slow to understand the situation in Hue and slow to react in a comprehensive way. Finally, after several days of fighting, the magnitude of the PAVN attack was recognized by both commands and steps were taken to isolate the PAVN forces in the city.¹⁶⁸ The ideal force to isolate the PAVN were the airmobile battalions from the 1st Cavalry Division.¹⁶⁹ Eventually, 3rd Brigade (3/1 CAV) was tasked with isolating Hue and seizing the primary highway going into the city.¹⁷⁰

Helicopters dropped off elements of 3/1 CAV approximately ten kilometers north of Hue.¹⁷¹ Almost immediately upon landing, they started receiving enemy fire from the PAVN 5th Regiment, which was defending a headquarters building as well as guarding the main supply route to PAVN forces.¹⁷² Thus, beginning the decisive fight to win the battle for control of Hue.

Initially, the numerically superior and well dug-in PAVN had the advantage. The first elements of 3/1 CAV were over whelmed by the PAVN 5th Regiment's firepower and almost did not survive first contact.¹⁷³ However, eventually 3/1 CAV's initial elements were able to establish a defensible position and slowly build up its combat power. The brigade was able to bring in five

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁶⁸ Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 151.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith, and Dawson, *US Marines in Vietnam*, 475.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 478.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

airmobile battalions and array them in a ring around the PAVN 5th Regiment.¹⁷⁴ By February 23, the US Army began closing their ring only to find many of the enemy positions abandoned.¹⁷⁵ The PAVN 5th Regiment had escaped the trap that the Americans were building, but in the process, they abandoned the PAVN 6th Regiment in Hue. Thus, severing the PAVN 6th Regiment's supply lines and any hope in achieving victory.¹⁷⁶

Deductions from Hue

The battle for Hue further evinces the nature of urban combat. As important as any tactical lesson, Hue demonstrates that at the operational level of war the most important aspect of urban warfare is isolating the city. Until the 1st Cavalry Division accomplished the isolation of Hue, the PAVN defenses remained strong.¹⁷⁷ The battle for Hue also demonstrated that the conventional military approach to urban combat remained the same. City combat required aggressive small-unit leadership, an application of a wide variety of techniques, and patient persistence.¹⁷⁸ The US Marines, ARVN, and VNMC all systemically recaptured the city, block by block. Urban combat in Hue also demonstrated that heavy firepower is still essential in the urban environment. Without weapon platforms such as tanks, Hue could have had a different outcome.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ William Thomas Allison, *The Tet Offensive: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 54.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Willbanks, "The Battle for Hue," 154.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Ramadi: People are Paramount

Twenty-eight years after Hue, the United States again found itself operating in a different environment than it expected. Instead of operating on the desert plains of Iraq, as in Desert Storm, US forces became involved in a counterinsurgency in Iraq's urban areas. One of the most contested areas within Iraq in early 2006 was Al-Anbar Province. It was here that US forces and the security forces of the new government of Iraq faced three different enemies. The first was Al Qaeda of Iraq (AQI), which was the most dangerous and ideological of all the groups.¹⁷⁹ The second were the Sunni nationalists who were favored under Saddam Hussein and who had lost political power with the invasion.¹⁸⁰ Finally, there was an unorganized criminal element that was interested in profiting from the general violence and lawlessness.¹⁸¹ The prime objective of coalition forces in 2006 was AQI, as well as those Sunni nationalist groups and criminal elements that supported AQI.

Al Qaeda in Iraq was organized in 2003 as part of the reaction to the US invasion. It was a subdivision of the larger Islamist Al Qaeda organization led by Osama Bin Laden. The leader of AQI was Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who first became involved with Al Qaeda in 1989.¹⁸² Estimates of the size of AQI fluctuate, but in 2006, it was believed that there were approximately 15,000 fighters in the country.¹⁸³ Many of the group's members were foreigners who entered into Iraq through Syria, but they also contained many radical Iraqi Islamists. Non-

¹⁷⁹ James Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 116.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Mary Anne Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi," *The Atlantic*, (July/August 2006): 33.

¹⁸³ Anthony H. Cordesman and Sam Khazai, *Iraq in Crisis* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2014), 178.

Iraqis, however, dominated its leadership.¹⁸⁴ The goals of AQI were to: (1) force US forces to leave Iraq, (2) defeat the Iraqi security forces, (3) overthrow the Iraqi government, and (4) establish an Iraqi Islamist state.¹⁸⁵

By the summer of 2006, there were approximately 5,000 insurgents active in Ramadi.¹⁸⁶ This strength in numbers gave AQI the assurance to declare their own independent state, the Islamic State of Iraq, with Ramadi as its capital. To control the city, AQI employed a variety of hit-and-run guerrilla tactics against coalition forces (CF) but favored the suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) the most because of their effectiveness.¹⁸⁷ These tactics enabled AQI to control virtually all of the city of Ramadi by the fall of 2006. Thus, armed insurgents became bold enough to travel openly throughout the city without any fear of reprisals.¹⁸⁸

In May 2006, the 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 1st Armored Division, under the command of Colonel Sean MacFarland, was ordered to Ramadi to relieve the 2BCT, 28th Infantry Division.¹⁸⁹ The 1BCT consisted of five combat battalions, which entailed over 5,500 personnel and 161 heavy armored fighting vehicles.¹⁹⁰ Colonel MacFarland's specific guidance

¹⁸⁴ Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi," 42.

¹⁸⁵ Michael Silverman, *Awakening Victory: How Iraqi Tribes and American Troops Reclaimed Al Anbar and Defeated Al Qaeda in Iraq* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2011), 60.

¹⁸⁶ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*, 198.

¹⁸⁷ Niel Smith and Sean MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review*, (March-April 2008): 47.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Michael Fumento, "Return to Ramadi," *The Weekly Standard* (November 27, 2006): 22.

¹⁹⁰ Jim Michaels, "Behind Success in Ramadi: An Army Colonel's Gamble," *USA TODAY*, May 1, 2007, accessed December 30, 2015, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20070501/1a_bottomstrip01.art.htm.

from his higher headquarters was to “Fix Ramadi but don’t do a Fallujah.”¹⁹¹ Executing a street-by-street, block-by-block operation to pacify the city was clearly prohibited.

Colonel MacFarland decided on a strategy similar to Colonel H.R. McMaster’s in Tal Afar, one described as clear, build, and hold.¹⁹² This strategy later became the concept of the US surge offensive throughout Iraq in 2007-2008.¹⁹³ The first step was for US forces to clear a particular discrete subsection of the city. This was accomplished by establishing a combat outpost in the midst of that section of the city. The US forces, supported by the Iraqi army, would then hold that section of the city against counterattacks or infiltration by AQI. As the US forces cleared and held their assigned part of the city, they and their Iraqi partners would simultaneously build institutions and infrastructure in that subsection to win the loyalty of that portion of the city’s population.¹⁹⁴ In this manner, sections of the city would gradually and systematically be brought under US control and then turned over to the government of Iraq. This plan was time consuming and arduous, however, it best minimized friendly casualties and ensured effective fires at the right place at the right time.¹⁹⁵ The 1BCT conducted one major operation a week to maintain the momentum of the attack and to keep the initiative. The tempo of the operation was also designed to keep AQI reacting to events. The goal of the clear, hold, and build strategy was

¹⁹¹ Arnold Schuchter, *ISIS Containment & Defeat: Next Generation Counterinsurgency – NEXGEN COIN* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2015), 316.

¹⁹² David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 207.

¹⁹³ Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 303.

¹⁹⁴ Kimberly Kagan, “The Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al Qaeda From Its Stronghold in Western Iraq,” *Iraq Report* (Washington DC: The Institute for the Study of War and The Weekly Standard, 2007), 6.

¹⁹⁵ Dick Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy Seals and the Winning of al-Anbar* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 103.

to deny them the ability to usurp the government of Iraq and to replace their ad hoc government with the security of the Iraqi army and police.¹⁹⁶

Step one in the 1BCT plan was to isolate the city and to deny it from external support. The concept was not to stop traffic from entering the city, but rather to control traffic coming into the city.¹⁹⁷ This was done by establishing outposts on the major avenues into the city from the north, west, and east. A platoon of Small Unit Riverine Craft (SURCs) interdicted any waterborne traffic.¹⁹⁸ These operations were to prevent the free flow of supplies and reinforcements into the city, thus, preventing any large-scale reinforcement to the approximately 5,000 AQI combatants operating in the city.¹⁹⁹

On June 7, 2006, an airstrike near Baghdad killed Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, AQI's leader.²⁰⁰ The 1BCT decided to take advantage of his death by accelerating the start of its operations into the heart of Ramadi. In June, the 1BCT ordered one of its battalion's, TF 1/37 Armor, to establish COP Falcon in the southwest section of the city.²⁰¹ The operation began with the night infiltration of a US Navy SEAL team into a preselected building that would be the center of the COP. As the SEALs secured the building, a route clearance team moved from Camp Ramadi down the route, clearing IEDs as they moved, to the COP.²⁰² A tank team then linked up with the SEAL team to help them secure sniping positions along likely avenues that AQI would use to counterattack against the COP. Meanwhile, combat engineers, escorted by armored vehicles, moved to the COP with flatbed trucks carrying supplies for constructing the COP.

¹⁹⁶ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 207.

¹⁹⁷ Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," 43.

¹⁹⁸ Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi*, 43.

¹⁹⁹ DiMarco, *Concrete Hell*, 198.

²⁰⁰ Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi," 48.

²⁰¹ Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 117.

²⁰² Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi*, 62.

Material such as concrete barriers, generators, building material, sandbags, and concertina wire were all transported into the city.²⁰³ Within hours the COP was secure, and over the subsequent days, the engineers continued to improve the position with more barriers, wire, and other defensive support. Two weeks later the COP was complete with over one hundred sections of concrete wall and 50,000 sandbags.²⁰⁴

COP Falcon became the base for CF operations in southwestern Ramadi. Its purpose was to protect the civilian population from AQI, and to establish control of the area for the government of Iraq. An IA and US company, and later on a SEAL element, made COP Falcon their permanent home.²⁰⁵ The COP also became the base for patrolling and intelligence gathering. From the COP, 1BCT exerted effective control several hundred meters in all directions in the city.²⁰⁶ COP Falcon successfully loosened AQI's control over the population of Ramadi population. Over the course of the next nine months, 1BCT established eighteen new COPs in Ramadi, thus, extending its influence and control, as well as the government of Iraq's, into every neighborhood in the city.²⁰⁷ COP construction became a routine procedure for 1BCT, and they became proficient at constructing a COP in less than twenty-four hours.²⁰⁸

The AQI leadership became aware of the threat that the COPs represented, and began attacking them to deny 1BCT the ability to control terrain. However, most of their attacks were not successful because they never got past the screen of snipers that were established around the COPs. One SEAL sniper team killed approximately two dozen insurgents attempting to attack

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 119.

²⁰⁵ Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi*, 65.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Michaels, "An Army Colonel's Gamble Pays Off in Iraq," 44.

²⁰⁸ Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 119.

COP Falcon in the first twenty-four hours of it being constructed.²⁰⁹ Snipers not only alerted the COPs of incoming enemy attacks but also over watched patrols.

When the 1BCT first arrived in Ramadi they had very little intelligence about the area they were operating in.²¹⁰ One of the purposes of the COPs was to help change this. This was done through patrolling and interacting with the population, this became known as census patrolling.²¹¹ Census patrols gathered information about the populations in the neighborhoods around the COPs. Knowing the people, where they lived, and whom they were associated with regarding family and tribe was critical information and could only be gleaned by interacting with the populace. These types of operations also made the CF visible to the population, reassured them of their intentions, and provided the opportunity for the population to provide additional information if they were inclined. The 1BCT used this information to build a human terrain database of the operational environment, which guided subsequent operations and decisions.²¹²

By August 2006, the precipitous rate of COP construction began to strain 1BCT's resources. At its apogee, a COP was being constructed every ten to fourteen days.²¹³ However, then these COPs needed daily resupply, which required a significant amount of energy to protect logistical convoys from IED, grenade, and gunfire attacks. Although these attacks were usually not successful, there were dozens a day and they caused the brigade to operate at a slower pace.²¹⁴ The 1BCT began to realize that they needed more manpower to maintain their initial impetus.

The Iraqi police were the ideal force to help with this issue. The Iraqi police had a legitimate presence in the COP neighborhoods, and they had the combat capability to deal with

²⁰⁹ Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi*, 66.

²¹⁰ Schuchter, *ISIS Containment & Defeat*, 320.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 321.

²¹³ Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 99.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

small-scale insurgent activity.²¹⁵ More importantly though, Iraqi police could organize and recruit locally. Unlike the Iraqi army forces, which were a national asset and subject to service anywhere in Iraq, the policy of the government of Iraq was to employ police in the area from which they were recruited.²¹⁶ Thus, local Iraqi leaders and CFs could recruit local men and guarantee them that they would report back to Ramadi for duty. The problem with recruitment, however, was that efforts to recruit police had been attacked by an AQI suicide bomber who managed to kill dozens of recruits.²¹⁷ Despite CF efforts to recruit police to back up the operations of 1BCT, the size and effectiveness of the Iraqi police in Ramadi did not change significantly throughout the summer of 2006.

The operational situation in Ramadi did not change until the Fall in 2006. The leadership of the Sunni population, the majority population of Al-Anbar Province, were the tribal sheiks.²¹⁸ Tribal sheiks were the leaders of their tribes and extended families. They were not elected, but rather chosen to lead by the tribal elders based on their competence. They had no formal title or position sanctioned by either the new Iraqi government or the regime of Saddam Hussein. Most had a close relationship with some branch of the former Baathist government, and like the general population in Al-Anbar, many had followers who had been important leaders in Saddam Hussein's military and intelligence apparatus.²¹⁹ Many were also involved in illegal activity such as smuggling.²²⁰ These sheiks, whose responsibility was the health and welfare of their tribe, had

²¹⁵ Anthony Deane, "Providing Security Force Assistance in an Economy of Force Battle," *Military Review*, (January/February 2010), 85.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

²¹⁸ Kagan, "The Anbar Awakening," 5.

²¹⁹ "Tribes Under Saddam," *Global Security*, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/tribes-2.htm>.

²²⁰ Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," 47.

little respect for the government of Iraq or the CF, but in 2006, they were becoming increasingly estranged from AQI.

The strife began to foment between the Sunni sheiks and AQI in August 2006 when Sheik Abu Ali Jassim openly encouraged members of his community to join the Iraqi police and to man a police station.²²¹ The AQI responded with a complex coordinated attack. They attacked the police station with a massive SVBIED, and kidnapped Sheik Jassim, whom they then murdered.²²² Possibly worst of all, they did not return the Sheik's body, thus denying his family the timely burial required by Islam.²²³ These attacks were the culmination of a brutal policy of murder and intimidation practiced by AQI against the mostly secular sheiks and their tribes for over a year.²²⁴ These egregious acts drove the sheiks to reconsider their alliances.

One of the reasons that the Sunnis allied with AQI instead of the CF was that they believed their long-term interests lay with AQI. The CF's consistent message was that they were a temporary presence in Iraq.²²⁵ In contrast, the AQI message was that they were a force in Iraq for good. The sheiks' interpretation of those messages was that they had to have an accommodation with AQI.²²⁶ The 1BCT brought a different message to their operations in Ramadi. The brigade's message was that they were Ramadi to stay until AQI was defeated.²²⁷ Their message to the sheiks was that if they remained loyal to AQI, then they would also suffer the consequences. This new message from the CF, combined with the brutality of AQI, convinced

²²¹ Kagan, "The Anbar Awakening," 7.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," 44.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

one sheik in particular, Abdul Sattar Eftikhan Abu Risha, that the best interest of his tribe lay with the 1BCT.²²⁸

Sheik Sattar, who was a minor sheik of a relatively small tribe, understood that he alone would not be able to alter the balance of power in the city, so he worked behind the scenes with the other sheiks, convincing them that their long-term interest lay with the coalition.²²⁹ His appealing personality, despite his minor status, was sufficient enough that in September 2006 he met with Colonel MacFarland, and pledged to him the Anbar Salvation Council's loyalty.²³⁰ This council was comprised of over forty Sunni tribal leaders who were all now willing to cooperate with CF and to oppose AQI.²³¹

The Al-Anbar Awakening was a turning point in Ramadi. The sheiks made hundreds of fighters available as recruits for the Iraqi Police.²³² More importantly, their tribal neighborhoods immediately became coalition-friendly and IEDs and sniping in those areas ceased immediately.²³³ The sheiks contributed a wealth of intelligence on AQI that included safe houses, names of leaders and fighters, supply routes, and weapons caches. They also began an active recruiting campaign to bring more sheiks into the alliance against AQI.²³⁴

With the support of the sheiks, the 1BCT's offensive of establishing COPs could continue with new momentum. Though the hundreds of Iraqi police recruits would not be available until they completed weeks of training, the sheiks' loyal followers instantly became a militia of

²²⁸ Ibid., 47.

²²⁹ Joshua Partlow, "Sheiks Help Curve Violence in Iraq's West" *Washington Post*, January 27, 2007, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/01/26/AR2007012601497.html>.

²³⁰ "Western Iraq," *The Institute for the Study of War*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.understandingwar.org/region/western-iraq>.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," 44.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," 44.

fighters that could control terrain in their neighborhoods, facilitate the establishment of COPs and take over COPs in the neighborhoods that were now friendly to the coalition. This change in allegiance by the sheiks took away AQI safe havens, and no longer welcomed their intimidation and brutal tactics.²³⁵ It essentially made AQI militants fugitives in their proclaimed capital. In return for the sheiks' support, 1BCT shared intelligence with them, provided protection, and steered millions of dollars in contracts and business to members of the allied tribes.²³⁶

By the beginning of February, the results of the combined 1BCT operations and the Al-Anbar Awakening were clearly evident and decisive. As 1BCT began preparing for its redeployment, IED attacks became less of a threat. The last month of their deployment there were zero IED attacks in the city.²³⁷ Operations by 1BCT, supported by the enthusiastic and effective efforts of the Iraqi army, police, and local militias, resulted in a seventy percent drop in engagements with AQI fighters.²³⁸

On February 19, 2007, the 1BCT relinquished control of Ramadi and prepared to redeploy to its home base.²³⁹ The 1BCT of the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) from Fort Stewart, Georgia took over Ramadi.²⁴⁰ The 3ID continued the fight, building on the strong relations and the tactics established by COL MacFarland and his leaders. The 3ID took additional losses and had more firefights, but by the summer of 2007, the city was not only secured, but was one of the

²³⁵ Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 57.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

²³⁷ Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," 51.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Kagan, "The Anbar Awakening," 10.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

safest areas in Iraq.²⁴¹ Al Qaeda of Iraq eventually gave up its plans for Al-Anbar to be the center of an Iraq caliphate and retrograded to safer areas outside of the province.²⁴²

Deductions from Ramadi

Ramadi demonstrated that sometimes in urban warfare it is just as essential to know how to bring a city back to life than it is to destroy it. By doing this, a better peace can be secured. In Ramadi, 1BCT achieved this through a three-step process. The first step of which was embarking on an aggressive offensive campaign to clear insurgents from selected neighborhoods and establishing a permanent military presence in the midst of the civilian population. Security permeated stability throughout Ramadi. Second, 1BCT transitioned areas of responsibility to a competent and capable indigenous force to maintain the initial gains won in areas. This was accomplished by executing a political line of effort just as aggressively as a kinetic line of effort. Finally, 1BCT and Iraqi leaders created a new narrative that was more attractive than AQI's. Through good governance in Ramadi, the city government's narrative proved to be more paramount and won the support of the people, thus, changing the tide in Ramadi.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

²⁴² Ibid.

Conclusion

Regardless of the event or reason that forces the US hand in extending its politics, tomorrow's world will be primarily urban; therefore, the US Army's next operational environment will more than likely be in a heavily populated area. This assertion is bolstered by historical evidence as well as the very nature of war itself. Preparing for future war in urban areas should, therefore, elevate in importance for the US Army; all other environments should become second tier. However, the Army's current focus on training, manning, and equipping does not reflect this logic.

The case studies in this paper illuminate four key observations regarding urban warfare, and highlight what changes the US Army may need to be prepared to make to succeed in tomorrow's complex and urbanized world. The first observation is understanding how to keep an urban area alive and thriving. Urban combat is not always about combat. Because the civilian population is integral to the urban environment, urban combat must be nested within the larger strategic context of US policy. Failing to tie appropriate tactical action to desired strategic goals only exacerbates the friction within an urban environment. Thus, military leaders must carefully plan urban combat operations in conjunction with political guidance so that military victories do not contribute to strategic defeat. Commanders in urban warfare must always remember that war is for political purposes, and in urban combat, political purposes often are more important than tactical military requirements.

Secondly, local authorities best resolve local problems. As Hue and Ramadi evinced, the military forces conducting the fighting must represent the urban population. This is not necessarily because of their military capabilities, but rather for credibility. Legitimizing the use of controlled violence is crucial in maintaining support from the local populace. A local face rather than one that does not speak the language or understand the local customs best achieves this.

The third observation is the importance of being able to operate decentralized. Again, as illustrated in this paper, it was the initiative and resourcefulness of the lower organizations that were instrumental in establishing the conditions for success. In the Battle for Hue, the initial companies sent to respond to the MACV compound's pleas for help were given very little guidance other than "go." As Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster highlights in *Transforming Command*, the horrible neglect of mission command in previous years has had a negative effect on the US Army's initial efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁴³ As the Army concentrates on returning to its conventional role, will younger leaders be able to operate decentralized or will this skill once again atrophy? British Royal Marines have observed this key necessity in urban operations and are currently creating flexible units that can either operate independently or mass very quickly as a battalion.²⁴⁴ It should be in the US Army's interest to examine other force structures that might enable it to thrive easier in populated areas.

Lastly, having supreme firepower is crucial. Cities today are comprised of ancient fortresses, thick concrete, and new advanced resilient materials. Having direct fire-systems that deny these structures advantages to an adversary is instrumental. This was seen in Aachen and Hue as the most contested fighting required superior firepower to be able to move building to building. The principles for maneuver remain the same in urban operations (suppression, breaching, and assaulting); however, a unit will not be able to move unless suppression is established. Thus, the value of direct fire systems will remain critical in tomorrow's battles.

As urban areas increase in strategic and operational importance, so will their focus in future operations. Thus, this paper hypothesizes that the urban environment will be the US Army's primary operating environment in the future. With this, the US Army needs to take an introspective look regarding its ability to manipulate a city to bring about a better peace.

²⁴³ Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the US, British and Israeli Armies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 23.

²⁴⁴ Kilcullen, *Out of The Mountains*, 283.

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